DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 213 RC 023 198

TITLE	National Framework for Rural and Remote Education.
INSTITUTION	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Carlton South (Australia).
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	30p.; Developed by the MCEETYA Task Force on Rural and Remote Education, Training, Employment and Children's Services.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mctyapdf/rural.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Distance Education; Educational Cooperation; *Educational Policy; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Foreign Countries; Geographic Isolation; Indigenous Populations; Information Technology; Professional Development; Relevance (Education); *Rural Education; School Community Relationship; Teacher Recruitment; Telecommunications
IDENTIFIERS	Aboriginal Australians; *Australia

ABSTRACT

Remote and isolated locations in Australia provide the greatest challenges for improving provision of education options and pathways for children and families. These challenges are often compounded when considering the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities, especially those that adhere to traditional cultures and lifestyles. In response to rural education recommendations of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, a task force developed a National Framework for Rural and Remote Education (In 1993, the Council of Australian Governments amalgamated a number of ministerial councils to optimize policymaking, one of which that emerged was the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, or MCEETYA--which in turn created various "task forces" to perform research and make recommendations.). The framework comprises a vision statement, four guiding principles, and a set of "essential enablers" for the provision of quality education in rural and remote locations. The essential enablers were identified through a search of the relevant literature and an analysis of eight case studies of workable local strategies to improve youth services, education, training, and employment in rural areas. The essential enablers are: personnel (teachers, administrative and classroom support, and specialists); relevant curriculum; information and communication technologies; multiple modes of delivery; environments formed through effective community relationships and partnerships; and resourcing. Each of these is examined separately, including key challenges and recommendations for implementation. Used in conjunction with existing policies and practices, this framework will ensure improvement in the quality of education available in rural and remote Australia. (TD)

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RC023198

ED 462 213

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

DEVELOPED BY THE

MCEETYA TASK FORCE ON RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION, TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the National Framework for Rural and Remote Education is to:

- provide a framework for the development of nationally agreed policies and support services
- promote consistency in the delivery of high quality education services to rural and remote students and their families
- provide reference points and guidance for non-government providers of services and support for education in rural and remote areas
- facilitate partnership building between government and non-government providers of services and support related to the provision of education in regional, rural and remote locations.

Rationale

Recommendation 4.4 in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report referred to the necessity to develop a national rural education policy. The task force believed that it would be more productive to develop an agreed framework that allows for local differences and provides flexibility in implementation by individual State and Territory education systems and sectors.

The framework focuses upon the requirements of providing education in rural and remote locations while recognising that country communities are often places of great innovation, expertise and resilience.

The context of rural and remote education

During the development of the framework, it became obvious that the terms 'rural', 'regional' 'country' 'remote' and 'isolated' had different connotations (and definitions) across the range of agencies, providers and people who use the terms, both in education and non-education settings. For the purpose of this framework, however, the terms 'rural' and 'remote' are used throughout.

Characteristics of places variously termed rural, regional, country, remote and isolated include:

- population size, movement and density relative to metropolitan centres, including the requirement for young people often to have to move to larger centres to access further education and training
- distance from large population centres and service centres, resulting in high travel and accommodation costs to users and providers of services
- high migration of families and youth to larger population centres

- existence of social infrastructure, including information and communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure
- levels and breadth of employment, and existence of key industry/activity
- diversity and levels of access to a range of youth services, including the full range of education services.

Generally, when there is a deficit experienced in any or all of these characteristics, rural, remote and isolated communities record higher than the national average for students 15 years and younger leaving school (particularly for Indigenous students) and lower participation rates in higher education. However, the participation rate in VET in rural and remote areas is higher than in urban centres. This may be due to the early school leavers seeking post-school options to support entry to the work force. Vocational education programs are also seen as a pathway into local or regional employment or in support of an existing family business.

In recognising the diversity of contexts and needs, the MCEETYA Task Force affirmed the significance of conclusions from a series of case studies developed to highlight workable and potentially workable local strategies to improve children's services, education, training and employment in rural and remote Australia. These case studies outlined the nature, outcomes and key aspects of the dynamics of eight community-based secondary school projects in diverse locations across Australia, using a set of benchmarks.

The factors that operated to drive successful outcomes were the:

- place of local commitment and ownership of programs that met locally specific need
- function of collaborative action between industry, civic and education partners
- need for predictable and sustained funding
- role of infrastructure that enabled development.

The case studies are available on the internet at www.edna.edu.au

Remote and isolated locations provide the greatest challenges for improving the provision of education options and pathways for children and families. These are often compounded when considering the aspirations and needs of Indigenous communities, especially where there is a very significant adherence to traditional culture and lifestyles. The framework enables considered responses to be made to the specific needs of Indigenous students and families.

Education in rural and remote Australia has experienced greater priority from all jurisdictions in recent years. This has been driven by several key forces, including a renewed recognition of the value of the economic and social contributions made by country people and country communities to the nation's output, and to the nation's well-being.

It has also been driven by communities and community leaders who articulate the services and support required by families and individuals and who are prepared to become involved in solution building.

There is a preference for whole of government action, and the utilising of leadership and capacities at all levels and locations is a priority for improving services and support.

The rapidly expanding ICT infrastructure available to rural, regional and remote locations is providing a powerful means of multiplying the impact of distance education techniques, and is transforming ways and means of providing access for all students and families to high quality education. Continuing action on improving access and cost issues is essential, together with ensuring that user computer/ICT competency levels are developed, to enable benefit from new technology options and services to be realised.

While much has been done at national and state levels to improve ICT in country locations, the major challenge that must be met in order to fully capitalise upon the revolution in online learning that is taking place is improvement in user affordability.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

Vision	By age 18, each young person residing in rural or remote Australia will receive the education required to develop their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the nation.
Principles	• Students and families living in rural and remote Australia have specific needs which are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations. • The needs of rural and remote students should be met through local commitment and ownership as well as through predictable and sustained government funded initiatives. • There is a high degree of variability in the characteristics of rural and remote communities, both within and between the States and the Northern Territory. • The provision of quality education in rural and remote Australia requires creative and flexible approaches that utilise leadership capacity at all levels, innovative technology and methodology, and whole of government approaches.

Essential Enablers	**P**ersonnel	**R**elevant Curriculum	**I**nformation and Communication Technologies	**M**ultimode delivery	**E**nvironments	**R**esourcing
	Training &Development **Leadership/Succession** **Recruitment/Retention**	**Pathways** **Standards** **Outcomes**	**Quality** **Access** **Content**	**Flexibility** **Innovation** **Structures**	**Cultural** **Sensitivity** **Partnerships** **Community**	**Predictability** **Assuring Quantity** **Building Capacity**
Key Challenges & Requirements	Diverse and reliable supply Succession plans Incentives Family assistance	Programs and services consistent with national goals Articulated planning for lifelong learning Access to VET Enterprise education	Broadband provision for rural/remote locations Affordability and accessibility Reliable infrastructure	Support of current modes ICT training and development for staff Broadening of best practice networks in rural/remote locations and across systems	Support of industry, civic education, government and non-government collaboration Identification and use of local expertise and leadership	Support for local social capital building Funding for equitable access Dissemination of best practice Whole of government approaches

RURAL AND REMOTE CONTEXTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Population Size, Diversity and Density **Community Opportunities** **Social Capital Building**
Distance **Flexibility** **Leadership** **Cooperative Action:—Local—Regional—Whole of Government** **Sustainability**

The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education

The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education (NFRRE) comprises three elements:

- a vision statement
- a set of principles
- a set of essential enablers for the provision of high quality education.

Vision

That, by age 18, each young person residing in rural and remote Australia will receive the education required to develop their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the nation.

This vision is supported by the National Goals of Schooling 3.1.

> *Schooling should be socially just so that:*
> *students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability and of differences arising from students' socioeconomic background or* ***geographic location*** *(emphasis added).*

The HREOC report also refers to eliminating *'...negative forms of discrimination based on...geographic location'*. It asserts that education for rural and remote students must be *'...available, accessible, affordable, acceptable and adaptable'*.

Principles

The framework is underpinned by the following **principles:**

- Students and families living in rural and remote Australia have specific needs which are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations.
- There is a high degree of variability in the characteristics of rural and remote communities, both within and between the States and the Northern Territory.
- The needs of rural and remote students should be met through local commitment and ownership as well as through predictable and sustained government funded initiatives.

- The provision of quality education in rural and remote Australia requires creative and flexible approaches that utilise leadership capacity at all levels, innovative technology and methodology, and whole of government approaches.

Essential Enablers for provision of quality education

A detailed search of relevant literature and an analysis of the success factors of the case studies referred to previously has resulted in a set of **Essential Enablers** for the provision of quality education in rural and remote locations. They are:

- **P**ersonnel—teachers, administrative and classroom support, specialists
- **R**elevant curriculum
- **I**nformation and communication technologies
- **M**ultiple modes of delivery
- **E**nvironments formed through effective community relationships and partnerships
- **R**esourcing.

Each essential enabler has been included in the framework because it is core to translating the principles into practice.

The acronym **PRIMER** reinforces the importance of the enablers. Enablers are the fundamentals for ensuring the provision of quality educational opportunities in country locations and for country communities.

Each enabler provides suggestions for areas in which effort should be focused. This does not preclude individual education systems developing their own strategies in accordance with local policies and priorities, which may include links and pathways with early years services and post-schooling options.

Personnel

Personnel is *all* the human resources required to staff and operate a preschool, school or education service.

Key challenges include:

- Recruitment—conducting sound work force planning to ensure that predicted staffing needs are met. It also refers to promoting teaching and living in the country.
- Retention—refers to ensuring that quality teachers and leaders are actively encouraged to remain in country locations. This can be achieved through initiatives such as incentives, as well as quality leadership and training and development programs.

- Training and development—access to quality and relevant training and development is essential to ensure that teachers are up to date in all areas of their work, and have the skills to implement rapidly expanding content and alternative methodologies.
- Appropriate succession planning—especially required for leadership and recruiting and retaining specialist staff.
- Development and utilisation of community expertise and leadership—essential to building and operating sustainable services and support.

Discussion

To address the issue of attracting and retaining quality teaching staff, jurisdictions have established incentive packages. These strategies differ according to local conditions. Current incentives provided variously include: teacher recruitment and scholarship programs; salary increase and other allowances such as rental subsidy; appropriate teacher housing; specific staff training and professional development opportunities; accrued additional paid leave; relocation allowances; motor vehicles; and/or guarantee of permanency and/or placement in a school of choice after meeting service obligations. While the degree to which these strategies are successful in achieving intended outcomes varies, maintenance of efforts to develop and implement new ways of attracting and retaining staff is required.

Additional strategies suggested by jurisdictions include consideration of accommodation of the personal support needs of family units. For example, one member may be engaged in the teaching profession and a partner may work outside the education sector and require relocation with a current employer or new employment opportunities. Rural and remote incentives are not confined to the teaching profession, and whole of government approaches are seen as more likely to be attractive in introducing and retaining education staff in rural, remote and isolated areas. Action continues to be needed to ensure that recruitment and placement policies and processes build upon the needs of individuals as well as systems and communities.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- continuing to promote the contextual and professional advantages of working in remote, isolated and rural areas in addition to offering financial and industrial conditions packages
- raising the profile of the profession by acknowledgment of the professional qualities of country teachers, leaders and support staff
- expanding scholarships and funded programs targeted at increasing the teacher and education support for personnel trained and prepared to serve for extended periods in rural, regional and remote locations
- the establishment of a national centre for rural education research and training and development which incorporates current initiatives and programs, and which focuses on partnerships and inter-agency strategies to drive local capacity building
- implementing programs and initiatives that recognise and enhance access to local community leadership and expertise.

Relevant curriculum

The case studies (and relevant research) developed by the MCEETYA Task Force show that curriculum best meets the needs of rural and remote students when:

- programs are developed in partnership with the local community that are responsive to local community needs and meet the requirements of a global society
- educational programs and curriculum are aligned with the requirements of the National Goals of Schooling and are appropriately applied to the local context
- educational options and pathways in schools are designed to articulate with training and employment pathways, so that students leaving school will have

  ...participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior secondary studies (source: National Goals of Schooling 2.3);

  and will have achieved

  ...employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life long learning. (source: National Goals of Schooling 1.5).

Discussion

The commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum was affirmed in the second declaration of the National Goals of Schooling in 1999.

There is a base set of knowledge, skills and understandings that young people require to progress and develop within their current learning contexts, and as they progress through levels of learning. Included here is a fundamental requirement for students to acquire competence in literacy and numeracy. Support for children and families during pre-school years is a major contributor. National efforts to 'close the gap' in literacy and numeracy outcomes against the national benchmarks need to be maintained, and expanded where required, for targeted populations.

The Framework for VET in Schools asserts that vocational education is a shared responsibility in the community and fosters collaboration between education, business, government and community interests. Vocational education recognises that students and their school communities have a significant and valued role in contributing to social, regional and economic development.

The National Youth Pathways Action Plan Task Force identified the need for a community climate which accepts responsibility for fostering the transition of young people from school to post-school options. Many agencies and systems have implemented policies and programs that directly target the needs of youth in areas like skill upgrading and confidence building. These need to continue and to be matched to both the local circumstances and the wider global context.

Efforts should be directed towards:

Ensuring that curriculum remains relevant and meets the needs of students by:

- continuing the priority of achievement of essential standards in literacy and numeracy by all students
- ensuring access to the eight areas of the curriculum for all students
- further developing the focus on transition points in schooling, particularly between middle and senior schooling, and the schooling/post-schooling exit points
- supporting learning in a variety of settings and experiences so that young people understand the relationships and flow between learning and working
- engaging local stakeholders (industry, business and community organisations) to develop strategies and options.

Information and communication technologies (ICT)

The MCEETYA Task Force recognises statements of the National Bandwidth Inquiry, AEIAC, 2000, which identified certain critical aspects related to rural and remote education, namely:

- Equitable access to quality online content is essential to the delivery of the curriculum to rural, remote and especially isolated students.
- '...find(ing) appropriate and empowering ways of meeting the challenges of providing affordable, quality and timely access to bandwidth, to enable Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas to participate fully in the information...' economy remains a priority.
- That, whilst issues of provision, bandwidth and quality are being addressed by jurisdictions including the Commonwealth, the MCEETYA Task Force notes that: '...policy makers at the national level should acknowledge that continual upgrading will be a necessary aspect of use of technologies'.

Discussion

Additional consideration directed at community access; affordability, reliability and availability of technical support; partnerships (government services and non-government, community); and training will importantly connect students within their own communities and with communities far and wide to increase identification with a 'national place'.

In response to Recommendation 8 of the Besley Report, Connecting Australia – Report of the Telecommunication Services Inquiry, a National Communications Fund (NCF) has been set up under the Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

The NCF will have $50 million over four years to improve service delivery for the health and education sectors and encourage high bandwidth data services to regional communities.

In January 2001 the Prime Minister announced the Schools Online Curriculum Initiative (SOCCI). The initiative, extending over five years, will provide for the large-scale, collaborative development of a national pool of online curriculum resources, supporting mechanisms for sharing the resources across school systems. In addition, the initiative will advance the development of a national market in quality-assured Australian online school resources. Funding for the initiative includes $34.1 million from the Commonwealth, to be matched by the States and Territories.

Online learning issues for the school sector are being progressed through Learning in an Online World – School Education Action Plan for the Information Economy, which has been supported by MCEETYA. Further information on the implementation of the action plan can be found at http://www.edna.au/preview/schools/reports/learningonline.pdf

Efforts should be directed towards:

- expanding the upgrading of infrastructure and ongoing training and development of professional expertise
- reducing the user costs of infrastructure to rural and remote locations and customers
- monitoring of the National Communications Fund and making required adjustments as necessary to maintain high levels of access and use
- collaborating with the SOCCI initiative to ensure that students and families in rural and remote locations have ready access to high quality online curriculum that is culturally affirming.

Multiple modes of delivery

The diversity of rural and remote locations needing quality education services requires a multimodal approach to delivery. Distance and population size and range of choice mean that not all curriculum will be available through face to face methods.

A strategy that focuses on flexible curriculum delivery using a variety of vehicles and structures is required. Examples include:

- the clustering of sites and pooling of resources to deliver a wider range of curriculum than would otherwise be available on one site
- short-term and long-term programs which support access to centres of excellence and specialisation
- hubs and service providers which prepare a range of curriculum content and make it available online, with appropriate marking and reporting services
- online provision; distance delivery education; mobile classrooms; face to face teaching; flexibility of/across year levels, flexible allocation of time; and home tutoring.

Discussion

Jurisdictions manage provision of distance education in different ways, depending on local contexts. However, this provision needs to be maximised by capitalising on expanded choice through the growing number of national and international providers of online curriculum.

Acceptable standards of provision address lifelong learning principles for all, and the range and variety of learning styles within each community. Mixed modes of delivery have been very successful in many locations, particularly where effort has been directed at engaging students in the design and delivery of their education services.

With the growing power, reach and affordability of ICT, efforts to both expand and refine different ways of delivery need to be maintained.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- publicising successful initiatives
- expanding the number of programs which enable and encourage flexible innovative delivery
- continuing the development of online curriculum materials that are inclusive of rural and remote contexts and circumstances, and identifying and then using best practice examples of online curriculum materials and pedagogies
- drawing on existing good practice which uses innovative delivery to address geographical disadvantage.

Environments formed through effective community relationships and partnerships

In accordance with the National Goals of Schooling:

Learning environments must be designed and managed to match principles and criteria of social justice, so that

> *All students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training* (source: National Goals of Schooling 3.6);
>
> *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students* (source: National Goals of Schooling 3.3).

Discussion

Learning environments in the broadest sense vary considerably throughout rural and remote Australia, as does the potential for communities to create partnerships which are fundamental to building learning environments. It is acknowledged that the fundamental capacity of a rural or remote community to build a learning environment will vary significantly throughout Australia. It is also the case that schools can play a vital role in local capacity building and utilisation. This is particularly so in remote Indigenous communities. The National Goals of Schooling statement requiring improved learning outcomes over time is particularly relevant.

Critical factors for many successful educational initiatives include close consultation with communities and the development of partnerships with them. By building effective community relationships and partnerships, projects can be tailored to meet local needs and conditions, as well as meeting wider requirements. A focus on building partnerships at both local and agency levels can result in heightened community involvement and facilitate sustainability. Partnerships are particularly important when planning for and delivering vocational education and training for Indigenous communities. This is because raising education provision and outcomes is central to furthering practical forms of reconciliation.

Partnerships are also important in framing the design of, and access to, the curriculum areas that are required to ensure all students experience learning consistent with the National Goals of Schooling.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- implementing the Commonwealth Government initiative on community-based participation agreements between ATSIC and remote Indigenous communities
- creating capacity for communities to develop local responses to local problems, and showcase exemplars of best practice. An example is the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy announced in the 2001–2002 Commonwealth Budget
- developing and encouraging partnerships between stakeholders from both within and among neighbouring communities so that effects caused through small populations are minimised
- identifying and disseminating examples of best practice strategies, such as outreach programs, that enhance partnerships and community involvement

Resourcing

Equity of resource allocation must be ensured, with resources targeted to identify local needs; provide facilities; encourage partnerships and community capacity building; provide transport, technology and care programs; and ensure access to libraries and to social, health and community development services and other agencies. Weighting of needs should, in giving consideration to resource allocation, be applied to match degrees of rurality, remoteness and isolation.

Discussion

The combined resources of the Commonwealth Government, the State Governments and communities are available to enable students to achieve success. The impact of resources is amplified when a combination of school, vocational and workplace learning is used to foster collaboration between education, business and industry, government and community.

The Commonwealth seeks to enhance the educational outcomes of all school students by providing support for education systems and schools through its funding programs, through policy development, and through research and analysis of nationally significant educational issues.

Whole of government approaches, together with effective local partnerships, can increase the impact of resource allocation and utilisation for families and communities.

Efforts should be directed towards:

- allocating appropriate resources to support addressing rural issues within jurisdictions
- maintaining a funding priority for rural and remote students and families
- ensuring that decisions about resource allocation for rural and remote education are based upon sound data
- developing and disseminating models of effective and efficient resource allocation and use to improve learning outcomes for rural and remote students.

Conclusion

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has stated that 'an emphasis on education as a right will require governments to fashion teaching and learning for individuals, taking into account all of their circumstances'.

The National Framework for Rural and Remote Education nests within the broader work of MCEETYA through its various task forces and working groups.

This framework informs the work of those groups which have a specific link to rural and remote issues, namely the Indigenous Education Task Force, the Vocational Education and Training in Schools Task Force and the Measurement and Reporting Task Force.

Used in conjunction with existing policies and practices, it will ensure that there is improvement for children and students in rural and remote Australia in the quality of provision of education available to them and to which they are inherently entitled.

Effective implementation of the framework will require development of indicators of success and appropriate ways and means of measuring and reporting on them.